[How Branson's Bulldog Courage Won]

Approximately 3,000 words SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: HOW BRANSONS' BULLDOG COURAGE WON

Date of First Writing February 28, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Richard E. Broome

Fictitious Name Raymond E Branson

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Name of Revisor State Office

It was a crisp, sunny day in February when I called at the law office of Raymond E. Branson at 1341 Main Street. He was sitting with his back to the door, with his feet on a vacant chair, reading a lawbook. He shouted a cordial “Come in,” in reply to my knock. He laid aside his book and rose to his feet as I entered: “Your's is a Welsh name, I think,” he said, extending his hand. Going on rapidly, he said with a chuckle: “The difference between the Irish and the Welsh is that the Welsh stopped fighting a thousand years ago, and the Irish never have quit.” [C.10. S.C. Box, 2.?]

All this time I was taking a mental picture of Mr. Branson. He is five and a half feet high. His heavy brown hair falls over his head in such 2 confusion that it reminds me of a brush

heap. His jaws are high and firm, and his chin stands out very prominently. His blue eyes are cordial but defiant. He throws back his ample shoulders when he stands. As I spoke of his general appearance, he explained, “The boys at the Cedar Creek public school nicknamed me 'B.D.' which they told me stood for bulldog, because, they said, I had a dogged way of holding on and a determination to win or die.”

As I stated the object of my visit, Mr. Branson listened, then said: “In that case, you might as well write down obstacles and vicissitudes at the start of my ramble, for my trail has been through flint rocks and oak stumps from the beginning of my life forty-six years ago to this good day of our Lord in 1939.” Then Mr. Branson went along over his route in this fashion:

“I was born on a farm near Cedar Creek, in Fairfield County, South Carolina, on January 9, 1893. My parents were Jacob Branson and Ann (Bickley) Branson. Mother told me once that my life began about 3 o'clock on the morning of that winter day during a violent storm of winds, rain, and sleet. I have often though of that day, because my career to date has been stormy and full of barriers. But the hickory tree on our farm soon taught me a lesson. I noticed it was buffeted by the same wind that blew down the pine, but it stood up straight when the sun shone.

“Father and Mother took more time and interest in helping me with my lessons than they did the other children, because I was the only child that was prone to study my books at night after the chores had been done. The year that I started to the public school, in 1900, when I was seven, my father died. That was a severe blow to the family. Mother was left with 3 eleven children, and the hardships increased as time passed. The farm embraced 140 acres. The land was sandy, and it would not produce good crops unless expensive fertilizer was applied, and this cost money.

“We had three mules, three cows, and some hogs. The oldest boy did the plowing, while the reminder of the children, me included, chopped cotton and hoed corn and potatoes. To

me, the summers were long and hard. Still, we did pretty well in farming, so far as living and paying taxes were concerned. I insisted on going to school during the fall, winter, and early spring; and Mother took my side of the controversy. The other children did not care to attend school regularly. Instead, they always had work at home. When the ground was too wet to work, they cut and hauled wood.

“This sort of program filled all the years of my early life, and we had a tug-of-war to get by on the farm. Yet it kept the home together. One day Mother came by as I was intensely reading a copy of the 'Tale of Two Cities,' by Charles Dickens. She smiled and said that she was happy because I loved to read books. 'You are wise in striving to prepare to make your living without becoming a farmer,' she said. I instantly thought of some poor tenant farmers then living in the Cedar Creek neighborhood.

“I had finished the public school curriculum in 1908. I was then fifteen years old, and I worked at a neighborhood sawmill most of the time from 1908 until 1912. I was only nineteen years old, but I got a man's wage at the sawmill, which averaged about $2.50 a day. Most of this wage went into the family budget, and I am not sorry of it, for I wouldn't have been the right sort of a lad if I hadn't aided my mother in her effort to bring up a family in the way it should go.

“In 1912, I entered a competitive examination at Winnsboro for a 4 University of South Carolina scholarship. There were about thirty-five young men in the contest, and they all showed a keen interest in the contest. I was the only contestant from Cedar Creek, and the son of lawyers and rich farmers looked at me as if I didn't count. But that spirit only increased my earnestness. I applied myself there with all the energy of my mind. when the hour expired, we turned in our questions and answers and were told that the winner would be announced in a day or two. Mother got notice from Winnsboro newspaper that I had won before she received the judges' verdict.

“Mother did everything she could to raise the money for my entrance at the University. But she could raise only thirty-two dollars. The scholarship certificate was valuable. It admitted me to room and classes free of charge, but there were such pressing needs as board, incidentals, washing, and clothes. Hence, the thirty-odd dollars I carried there were hardly a drop in the bucket. I explained my predicament to the president and faculty, and they got busy. I was soon paying my board by waiting on the table at the mess hall. In a few days, I got a chance to make three dollars, by selling shoes up town on Saturday. This sum served for my incidentals.

“From 1913, through 1915, during my freshman, sophomore, and junior semesters, I followed this plan in general. But it took more money than I had, so I sold life insurance during the periods that I was out of school. This kept me up late at night studying my lessons. In the fall of 1915 and the spring of 1916, I taught country schools and saved all I could that way. Early in 1917, the draft board sent me to Camp Jackson, where I was to train for overseas service.

“At Camp Jackson, I peeled potatoes, swept floors, or did some kindred 5 work daily, in addition to drilling twice a day. One day, nearly three months after I entered Camp Jackson, I was mustered with a large number of other young men to entrain for New York, where a transport would take us to France. There a keen-eyed doctor Cove us a rigid examination and discovered certain disabilities in me that cut me out. I was given an honorable discharge after serving at Camp Jackson eighty-two days.

“I returned to my mother's home in Fairfield County and did my share of the work an the farm, as it was too late for me to get a job teaching school. In 1921, I returned to the University, with the ardent hope that I could work my way through to an A.B. academic degree and an L.L. D. degree in law. My expenses that year were much greater than they had been. Books cost more; better clothes were required; and even incidentals were dearer. I was unable to got any odd jobs, and I was soon behind with my board bill and

other obligations. I was so determined to win my degrees that I almost grew ill over the vicissitudes I was facing.

“One morning, following a restless, almost sleepless, night, I went to the law office of Senator James H. Hammond and told him of my predicament. Mr. Hammond was courteous and sympathetic, but he explained he was a poor man and hadn't any money to loan. I kept talking. Suddenly Mr. Hammond wheeled around facing his desk, apparently making a notation. When he revolved his chair and faced me again, he handed me a check for one hundred and twenty-five dollars. I was pretty well overcome when I realized what had happened, but I told Mr. Hammond I would return the money in sixty days.

“With money to supply all my wants till June, 1922, I soon found more work than I could attend to, and my anxiety was lessened. I pressed 6 on and won my degrees, A.B. and L.L. D., the following June, 1922. And I didn't let the grass grow under my feet after that victory was won. I opened up my law office about the first of July and began practice. Clients came slowly at first. I talked with older members of the bar, and they told me they almost starved during their first year as a lawyer. I bent to the task of building up a practice, and clients began to increase. But they were people of limited means, and I had to work hard to earn enough to take care of my expenses and leave enough for me to live on.

“In the meantime, I had great luck. Mr. Hammond's kindness shoved me over the poverty barriers in the late winter days of 1922, and I earned considerable money. My relatives had some luck, too, and they sent me a substantial sum. So, at the end of sixty days, I was able to walk around to Mr. Hammond's office and pay him $125, as per promise. He was amazed when I paid him. 'I thought you would pay me sometime,' he said, 'but I certainly didn't expect you pay it in sixty days.'

“As my practice increased, I began to think of my one and only romance. I had met Miss Cleo Shealy two years before. We decided to get married as soon as we could pull out of

the financial fog, and both of us kept watch on our progress. About December 1, 1923, we decided that we could safely make the marriage grade. And, on December 23, 1923, we married and went to housekeeping at 5433 Wilson Boulevard. We still reside there. At first, we didn't' entirely own the home. But we had faith in ourselves and paid the mortgage off in a few years.

“In 1925, I became a candidate for the House of Representatives in the South Carolina General Assembly. I won that election and the two succeeding elections and served in the House from 1926 to 1932. This service 7 in the legislature taught me much. The candidate on the stump, seeking election, is generally an optimist. He promises many things that may never happen. I was cocksure I could secure many benefits for the people, but, when the moment came to act, I found many opponents on any given proposition.

“I know now that human nature, being what it is, never permits us to be completely content. If we possess a thousand dollars, we are not content until we have another thousand dollars, and so on to the end of the world. Such is the endless chain of life, and we never reach complete happiness on this planet. I came away from the State House somewhat saddened, but much wiser than when I entered it. My services there, I think, aided my law practice. Although the whole country was just plunging into the depression, business picked up wonderfully for me. I have, since 1926, specialized in civil practice, particularly in realty.

“There hasn't been a single year, since 1932, that my practice has netted me less than $3,000 a year. The civil practice of law is more profitable than the criminal practice. And I like it better, because it takes me out of the environment of the criminal world. I am a retained attorney for the Columbia Federation of Trades, and at present two or more other civic organizations are negotiating with me for similar engagements.

“I am called on for many addresses by civic, social, and business organizations. That is why I have complied this typewritten book of 1,108 jokes.” Here Mr. Branson picked up a

volume and began to finger it. A single joke, credited to the late President Calvin Coolidge, may serve as an example: “The President was reading a newspaper in his office, and his stenographer, standing at the window, said: 'There is Senator William Borah, 8 taking a horseback ride.' Without looking, the President asked: 'Are the Senator and the horse going in the same direction?”

“When I was studying law at the University of South Carolina, Judge W.[?]. Bonham, now a member of the Supreme Court of South Carolina, spoke to the law classes. His impromptu address was full of practical ideas for law students, but one particularly stuck with me. Justice Bonham said, 'If a man stumbles, help him; if he lies down, don't!' I have made that epigram a sort of second nature, and I practice it studiously in my method of living along the way.

“When I began the practice of law in 1924, I saw the benefit of contacting other men, and, as I have always been a social person myself, I joined Acacia Blue Lodge of Masons, but I was not content to rest there. I pressed on and took the Scottish Rite from the fourth degree to the thirty-second degree. Then I joined the Odd Fellows, the Eagles, and the Junior Order of United American Mechanics. I find sufficient good in all these organizations to retain my membership in them. My wife became interested in these orders, and she is now a member of the Rebekah Lodge No, 6, the woman's organization of the Odd Fellows.

“Mrs. Branson and I are also members of the Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church, and we attend there regularly. I consider it a high privilege to bow my knee to the triune God, even if I am, as some of my friends say, too dogged to bow to tyrants and some other dictators.

“I am inclined to think that I have about uncovered my life and the tug-of-war I have had to date. I am now in my forty-sixth year, and, within the next twenty years, I fully expect to

blaze some new trails. To paraphrase John Paul Jones' fighting reply to his adversary, 'I have just begun to fight.'"